

Department of Philosophy and Religion
Skidmore College

PH 341: Philosophy of Literature
T-TH 2:10-3:30

Reg Lilly
Spring 2009

This course is not a 'philosophy through literature' class, but is a philosophical reflection on the nature of the literary text. The 19th and early 20th centuries in philosophy were dominated by German thought – Hegelianism, NeoKantianism, phenomenology, and Marxism. The latter half of the 20th century saw a renaissance of French intellectual and philosophical life which moves well beyond its German origins. While there was, in this German tradition, a reflection on the nature of literature and language, for the most part it was a subordinate concern. Many post-war French thinkers have made the philosophy of language and literature a major, even preeminent focus of their concerns. This seminar will examine the philosophy of literature and literary theory as it has been practiced by the French for the last 60 years or so. These philosophers, theorists and writers are notoriously difficult; reading and understanding them requires work and patience.

Texts:

Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*
Ricoeur: *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Texas Christian Univ. ISBN
Blanchot: *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*,
Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*,
Mallarmé, *Collected Poems and Other Verse*
Poe, *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*

Readings:

Week 1

- * **Calvino, *The Uses of Literature*, pp. 39-61 “Philosophy and Literature” & “Literature as a Projection of Desire”; “Definition of Territories: Eroticism” (Handouts)**
- 1/20: Introductory Remarks
- 1/22: Culler, pp. 18-42 “What is Literature and Does it Matter?”; pp. 55-69, “Language, Meaning and Interpretation”; pp. 110-22, “Identity, Identification, and the Subject”

LANGUAGE & WRITING

Week 2

- * **Ricoeur, “The Interweaving of Fiction and History” (Handout)**
- 1/27: Ricoeur, “1: Language as Discourse,” pp. 1-23
- 1/29: Ricoeur, “2: Speaking and Writing,” pp. 25-44.

Week 3

- * **Irwin, pp. 161-89, Garcia, “A Theory of the Author”**
- 2/3: Irwin, pp. 3-22, Foucault, “What is an Author”; Barthes; “The Death of the Author”, Handout: Barthes, “From Work to Text”

2/5: Irwin, pp. 65-91: Lamarque “The Death of the Author: an Analytical Autopsy”; Holt, “The Marginal Life of the Author”

Week 4

* **Davidson, “Locating Literary Language”** (Handout)

2/10: Irwin, pp. 95-128: Nehamas, “Writer, Text, Work, Author”; Pappas, “Authorship & Authority”

2/12: Derrida, “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” (Handout)

Week 5

* **Derrida, “This Strange Institution Called Literature”** (Handout)

2/17: Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context” (Handout)

2/19: Derrida, “The Law of Genre” (Handout)

Week 6

* **Harrison, “‘White Mythology’ Revisited: Derrida and His Critics on Reason and Rhetoric”**

2/24: Derrida, “The White Mythology” (Handout)

2/26: Derrida, “The White Mythology (cont.)

(Handout)

LIMITS, LANGUAGE & LITERATURE

Week 7

* **Blanchot, “How is Literature Possible?”** (Handout)

3/3: Blanchot, “The Pure Novel”; “The Language of Fiction” (Handouts); “Speaking is Not Seeing” (Handouts) **(Text Integration Due)**

3/5:

Spring Break

Week 8

* **Blanchot Reader, pp. 191-199: “Madness of the Day”**

3/17: *Blanchot Reader*, pp. 401-27, “The Essential Solitude” and “Two Versions of the Imaginary”

3/19: Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, 38-73 (Mallarmé) (Handout)

Week 9

* **Hill, “Blanchot and Mallarmé”** (Handout)

3/24: Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, pp. 87-119. (The Work and Death’s Space)

3/26: *The Blanchot Reader*, pp. 429-32; “Reading” & “The Gaze of Orpheus”; Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, “Inspiration, Lack of Inspiration,” pp.177-87; “Sleep, Night,” pp. 264-68.

Week 10

* **Blanchot Reader, pp. 131-187 “Death Sentence” (Starting thinking about research topics – see me!)**

3/31: **Blanchot, “The Disappearance of Literature,”** *Blanchot Reader*, “The Power and the Glory,” pp. 451-57.

4/2: *Blanchot Reader* pp. 459-69, “Narrative Voice; “The Absence of the Book,” pp. 471-86.

DESIRE, LITERATURE & DISPOSSESSION

Week 11

- * TBA
- 4/7: John Anzalone TBA
- 4/9: John Anzalone TBA

Week 12

- * **Ungar, Steven. "The Professor of Desire," (Handout)**
- 4/14: Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 3-33
- 4/16: Barthes, *Pleasure of the Text*, 33-67

Week 13

- * **Richardson, "Death, Communication, and the Experience of Limits"**
- 4/21: Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* (selections); (Handout) (**Research Paper Proposals Due**)
- 4/23: *The Rustle of Language*, (selections) (Handout)

Week 14

- * **Bataille "Happiness, Eroticism and Literature"**
- 4/28: Bataille, "Erotism"

Course Requirements

Readings must be thoughtfully completed before the seminar meetings; all essays should be emailed either as an 'RTF' or Word attachment, or in the body of the email. Students will write a research paper on a topic arrived at *in consultation with Reg. Lilly*. The research paper is due May 5.

Research Paper: 40%
Text integrations 20% each
Text Commentaries 10%
Participation: 10%

The texts marked by an asterisk (*) and in bold type indicate "**Integrative Readings.**" These texts may be referred to during the class discussions, but will not be the basis for the seminar discussions and presentations. You should read these materials by the middle of the week. Integrative Readings are chosen with a view to initiating an intertextual engagement with the texts that are being treated in class during the same week.

Text Commentaries: During each week you should, in addition to the 'regular' readings, read the "Integrative Readings" and, by Sunday of each week, write a commentary on the week's integrative text. Your commentary should be approximately 500-700 words and emailed to me as an rft document. These commentaries will be collected into an electronic journal which will be assessed as we go through the semester. Text Commentaries should focus on the manner in which the Integrative Reading contributes to an appreciation of the texts with which they are associated. This contribution may be of many different sorts: critical, supplementary, interpretive, exegetical, emphatic, elaborative, etc.

Text Integrations: Two texts integrations are required of 1,500 words or more. Text integrations are similar to Text Commentaries. While the commentaries focus more heavily on the Integrative Reading, text integrations should seek 1) to take into account a broader range of the primary readings than in the text commentaries, 2) to establish a 'dialogue' between the Integrative Reading and the primary texts in

which the Integrative Reading is considered from the point of view of the primary texts, and 3) establish a interpretive standpoint for the above.

On **Feb 26** and **Aril 28** Text Integrations are due; to avoid end-of-the-semester crunch, I encourage you to complete your second integration earlier than 4/28.

Research Papers: Research papers are to be 3,500-4,000 in length. Proposals must have a **topic** and a **bibliography**. Papers must be written on the proposed topic. Further details will be forthcoming.

Office Hours: T-TH 3:30-4:30 & W 9:30-12:00 & 1:00-2:30 and by appointment.
LADD 218; ext. 5406; rlilly@skidmore.edu

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and a personal affront that may jeopardize one's class and College standing.

During the course of the semester this syllabus may change if conditions warrant it.

Handouts

John Gregg, "Blanchot's Suicidal Artist: Writing and the (Im)Possibility of Death" (Handout)

Foucault, "What is an Author"

Derrida "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences"

Derrida, "The White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy"

Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context"

Derrida, "The Law of Genre"

Bataille, "Surrealism and How it Differs from Existentialism"

Shavero, Steven. "Transgression, Interdiction, Affirmation: Bataille and Contemporary Theory"

Marshall, Donald G. "The Necessity of Writing Death and Imagination in Maurice Blanchot's *L'Espace littéraire*," *Boundary 2* (Fall-Winter, 1985-1986),

14:1-2, pp. 225-236.

Christopher New, *The Philosophy of Literature*

Sartre, *What is Literature*

Shoshana Felman, *Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis, Writing and Madness*